

# **“What is the NCLB?” and Ten Other Things Parents Should Know About the *No Child Left Behind Act***

Although the new law offers a wealth of information and options for parents, few parents know about the law or how it impacts their child’s education. Following are commonly-asked questions parents ask about the NCLB, highlighting major changes in the law that affects Wisconsin parents. For more information about NCLB, visit the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website at [www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/esea/index.html](http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/esea/index.html).

## **1. What is NCLB?**

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), a major reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was passed by Congress and signed into law by the president on January 8, 2002. ESEA traditionally covered supplemental aid for poor and disadvantaged children in K-12 education, but evolved over the years to address other education reform priorities for all children.

NCLB redefines the federal role in K-12 education and seeks to help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. The Act, encompassing 45 programs totaling an annual federal investment of \$19 billion in 2003-04, also requires schools and districts to involve parents in new ways in the hard work of school improvement. Wisconsin's total funding for 2003-04 under the NCLB Act is approximately \$278 million in 16 different programs.

## **2. How does the NCLB affect my child’s education?**

NCLB requires all states to develop and administer annual tests in reading and math for all students in grades 3-8 and at least once in these subjects in grades 9-12. These tests must align with each state’s current academic content standards.

Test scores are assigned to one of four levels that describe how well students performed on the state tests: advanced, proficient, basic, and minimal performance. The overall goal of the NCLB is to have all children score proficient or advanced on statewide tests in reading and math by 2014. Between now and 2014, schools must take a specific series of steps to move toward that goal. The law requires schools to work hard in four areas:

- helping students meet challenging academic standards in reading, math, science, and testing students in those areas.
- making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) by annually demonstrating that all students are meeting state goals for reading and math.
- collecting and reporting student achievement data.
- ensuring that all teachers are highly qualified.

## **3. What is AYP or Adequate Yearly Progress?**

Schools must show that they make continual progress toward the goal of having all children proficient in math and reading by 2014. Wisconsin has devised a series of indicators or benchmarks that show if schools are making the required progress each year. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the annual accounting of indicators, taken from student test results which schools, districts, and the state

must meet under NCLB. These indicators require schools and districts to:

- test 95% of enrolled students in grades 4, 8, 10 in reading and math. In 2005-06, this requirement changes to include 95% of enrolled students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school.
- meet state goals for student attendance in school and for high school graduation.
- meet annual achievement goals set by the state in math and reading.

In addition, schools must break down, or disaggregate the achievement scores and test participation percentages by race, economic status, students with disabilities and limited English proficient students. All of the disaggregated subgroups must meet the annual accountability indicators. A subgroup is defined as a group of at least 40 students, except for subgroups of students with disabilities, which must have at least 50 students. Failure to meet an annual indicator for two or more years in a row results in a school or district being identified for improvement.

## **4. How will I know how well my child is learning?**

Schools must send parents information about their child’s level of achievement on state tests. Parents currently receive their child’s statewide test results on two state tests:

- the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test in grade 3, and
- the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) in grades 4, 8, and 10.

The WKCE not only assess student performance in reading and math, as required by NCLB, but they also assess student performance in language arts, science, and social studies, as required by Wisconsin state law. Beginning in 2005-06, to comply with NCLB requirements, Wisconsin will assess reading and mathematics performance annually in grades 3 through 8 and 10. A Student/Parent Pre-Test Guide for the WKCE is available on-line at [http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/oea/kce\\_publin.html](http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/oea/kce_publin.html).

## **5. How can I find out how my child’s school is doing?**

All school districts are required to send parents an annual school performance report. The report contains information on student performance and on the learning opportunities schools offer to students. A listing of all information

included in the School Performance Report is available at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/spr/about.html>.

Parents can also access information about how their child's school is doing through the Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS). Detailed student performance information by school and district is featured on the WINSS website at

<http://data.dpi.state.wi.us/data/selschool.asp>.

In addition, each school district receiving Title I funds must give out a report card to parents and the public that includes information at the district and school levels on student achievement on state tests, graduation rates, and teacher qualifications. Student achievement on state tests must be indicated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and status as economically disadvantaged.

District report cards must be disseminated to all parents of students attending district schools in an understandable format and language. Districts must also make the report cards widely available to the public via the Internet, media, and public agencies.

## **6. What happens if my child's school does not make AYP?**

Schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress for two or more consecutive years are identified for improvement. Although all districts and schools are subject to testing and accountability requirements, only districts and schools receiving federal Title I funds are subject to federal sanctions for not making adequate yearly progress for two or more years in a row.

The following federal sanctions are cumulative. That is, schools who continue to be identified for improvement must add on each additional year's sanctions to the sanctions it already has.

**After 2 years:** Schools must adopt two-year improvement plans, invest in professional development for teachers, and give parents the option to transfer their children to a higher-performing public or charter school in the district, with the district paying for transportation. Priority for transfers will go to the lowest-achieving, low-income students.

**After 3 years:** Schools continue improvement efforts and give students from low-income families the option of obtaining supplemental educational services (i.e. tutoring) from state-approved providers.

**After 4 years:** Schools continue previous improvement activities and also are subject to "corrective action." Corrective action must involve one or more of the following: implementing a new curriculum, replacing school staff, appointing an outside expert as advisor, extending the school day or year, or restructuring the school.

**After 5 years:** Schools must plan for restructuring, which may involve replacing staff, contracting with a private firm to manage the school, or turning school operations over to the state education agency.

**After 6 years:** Schools must implement their restructuring plan.

## **7. What can I do if my child is in a school identified for improvement?**

First, get a clear understanding of why your school is in improvement status. Title I schools in improvement status must notify parents that their child's school is identified for improvement and state the reasons why. Or ask your school principal to explain it to you. Second, get involved in school improvement efforts. Most schools offer a variety of opportunities for parent involvement. Finally, parents in schools that receive Title I funds will be notified of additional options available to them (please see the sanctions listed above under Question 6).

## **8. How does NCLB ensure quality teaching in my child's school?**

In every school, all teachers of core academic subjects – English, language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography – must be "highly qualified" by 2005-06. Between now and then, every newly hired teacher must be highly qualified.

Currently licensed teachers in Wisconsin are "highly qualified" if they hold at least a bachelor's degree, are fully licensed or certified by the state in the subjects they teach, and can demonstrate competence in the subjects they teach.

Title I schools must notify parents annually that they can request information about the qualifications of their children's teachers. Parents in these schools must also be notified if their child is taught for more than 4 consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not "highly qualified."

Paraprofessionals, or teacher assistants with instructional duties, newly hired after January 2002 must have two years of college or an associate's degree, or they must demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to assist with reading, writing, and mathematics through a formal state or local assessment. Currently employed paraprofessionals have until 2006 to meet these requirements.

## **9. How does the NCLB help keep schools safe?**

The NCLB provides schools with funds to improve school safety. In addition, Wisconsin is required to develop a state policy that identifies persistently dangerous schools. NCLB requires schools to notify parents if they have been so identified.

## **10. How can I be involved in my child's school?**

Ask your principal how you can become involved. All Title I schools consult with parents about the program and how parents will be involved. School districts must have a written parent involvement policy that describes how it will help Title I schools plan and implement effective parent involvement activities. Districts receiving more than \$500,000 in Title I funds must use at least one percent of those funds for parent involvement activities. They may also establish parent advisory councils.

Title I schools must conduct an annual meeting for Title I parents and inform parents about Title I programs, the school curriculum, and student achievement data.

**11. What other information does NCLB require schools to give parents about their child's education?**

NCLB requires schools to inform parents about their right to

- request that their child's name, address, and telephone number be withheld from recruiters for the military and for institutions of higher education.
- inspect student surveys and to opt their child out of those surveys if the surveys collect, disclose, or use personal information about students in any of eight categories related to the behavior, attitudes, or beliefs of students or their families.

Schools must also involve parents in establishing policies that notify parents of the right to inspect student surveys at the beginning of each school year.

School districts using Title III funds must also conduct effective outreach to parents of limited English proficient children, informing parents how they can be involved in their children's education and regularly meeting with parents to respond to parent recommendations for improving their child's education.